

THIS MONTH

Wireless networks are good for letting you get on the internet without cables, but can they be used for fun? Violet thinks so, and its Nabaztag is officially the world's first wireless rabbit. Plug this chap in and connect him to your wireless network and he'll receive messages, read the weather forecast and tell the time, all while flashing wildly and moving his ears. Our rabbit was the talk of the office, and you can read the full review on page 39.

Networks serve a practical purpose, however, and our Audio section focuses on two products that help you stream a music collection around the home. Evesham's M-box includes a streaming server with 160GB of storage and a wireless MP3 player that you can put anywhere in your home. Philips' SLA5520 is a cheaper option for those who already have a PC they can use as a server. Its slick hi-fi design means it happily integrates with existing kit.

So read on, and you'll find our massive selection of reviews offers something for everyone.

David Ludlow

Reviews Editor

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PC NEXTDAY

Zoostorm 9-6402 Gaming PC

★★★★

£1,028 inc VAT

PC Nextday's Zoostorm 9-6402 is one of the first PCs we've seen to use Nvidia's GeForce 7900GT graphics chip. Aimed at gamers, it offers a good balance between cost and performance, and this helps to keep the PC at around the £1,000 mark.

The Zoostorm sailed through our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 benchmarks as we expected, although the frame rates aren't very different from those of the older 7800GTX. All but the most demanding gamers will be satisfied with this system. The SLI motherboard means you can add a second 7900GT at a later date for a performance boost.

To keep the price down, PC Nextday has opted for a standard Athlon 64 3800+ processor rather than a newer dual-core processor. While the 3800+ might not have the same levels of performance as a dual-core processor, it's sprightly enough for most tasks, as our benchmark results show. If you want to encode a lot of video, though, we'd recommend you go for a PC with a faster processor.

The 300GB hard disk is generous and will provide plenty of room for all your programs, videos, music files and images. A handy memory card reader is included, so it's easy to get pictures from your digital camera.

The bundled 19" Xerox monitor is a strange choice, as it has only an analogue input and the graphics card has dual digital outputs. This wouldn't have been such an issue if the picture quality had been better. We had to fiddle with the onscreen controls to get a decent picture and, even after doing so, we were disappointed with the monitor's dingy white and its inability to display a smooth gradient in our greyscale test.

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Evesham Axis Dominator 76GT ★★★		Dell Axim X51v ★★★★★		Dell 2005FPW ★★★★★	
HP Compaq Presario SR1719UK ★★★★★		Orange SPV C600 ★★★★★		Dell 3400MP ★★★★★	
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Rock Pegasus 550N ★★★★★		Epson AcuLaser CX11NF ★★★★★		Canon EOS 350D ★★★★★	
Rock Xtreme CT 2.0GHz ★★★★★		Epson Stylus Photo RX640 ★★★★★		Canon PowerShot A610 ★★★★★	
		HP Deskjet 5940 ★★★★★		Epson Perfection 2580 Photo ★★★★★	
		HP Photosmart 3210 ★★★★★		Epson Perfection V700 Photo ★★★★★	
		HP Photosmart 8250 ★★★★★		Nikon CoolPix 5600 ★★★★★	
		Kyocera Mita FS-1920n ★★★★★		Nikon CoolPix S5 ★★★★★	
		Samsung ML-2250 ★★★★★		Olympus SP-350 ★★★★★	
				Pentax Optio M10 ★★★★★	



A Creative X-Fi sound card is included, which has support for EAX processing to improve sound in games that support it, such as Doom 3. Although the X-Fi supports 7.1 surround sound, you'll have to be content with the Philips MMS460 5.1 surround-sound speakers instead. Although very loud, there is some distortion at the highest volumes and the treble is a little harsh.

The Zoostorm's motherboard has a large and unusual wind tunnel-like fan duct to keep the processor cool. This blocks access to the two free RAM slots, but it can be removed easily when upgrading. If the two optical drives aren't enough, there's space for three more. There's also room for another three hard disks but space is cramped so installation could be tricky. There are no free PCI slots, which could be limiting if you want to add an internal TV tuner or WiFi card, although the six USB2 ports compensate for this to an extent.

A comfortable five-button wired Microsoft laser gaming mouse has been included, although it isn't as nippy as some other gaming mice we've tested. The wired Genius keyboard feels very responsive, although the curved ergonomic layout could irritate some touch-typists. We weren't impressed with the two chunky

Genius USB game pads, which are awkward and uncomfortable to hold.

The Zoostorm 9-6402 is a respectable gaming PC that should keep most gamers happy with its smooth frame rates. But if you want to do more with your PC than just play games, you'll be disappointed by the poor-quality monitor. Systems using the older 7800GTX graphics card, such as the Vantage X2 Extreme Gaming System (reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* June 2006), can deliver equivalent gaming performance with more expansion options and a faster processor at around the same price.

Alan Lu

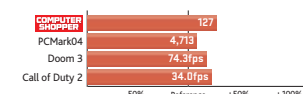
SUMMARY

- ✓ Good 3D games performance
- ✓ Large hard disk
- ✗ Poor-quality monitor

DESKTOP PC 2.4GHz AMD Athlon 64 3800+, 1GB RAM, 300GB hard disk, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 256MB Nvidia 7900GT, 19" LCD

SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 58)



PC SYSTEMS

FAQ

Q You said in *What's New, Shopper* June 2006 that it was really hard to install Windows on an Intel-based Mac. But hasn't Apple just released a tool that can do exactly that?

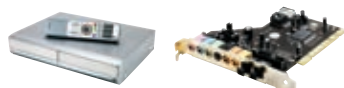
A Two days after *Shopper* went to press, Apple announced Bootcamp, which lets you install Windows XP on an Intel-based Mac. This tool takes care of partitioning your Mac's hard disk and creates the necessary boot and driver CDs that you'll need to get the system working.

You can download the software for free from www.apple.com/bootcamp. We've tried it on our Mac mini and it was very easy to use. If you're interested in how it performs, see our news story on page 246 for the results of our standard PC benchmarks.

Alan Lu
PC systems and storage expert



alan@computershopper.co.uk



Video page 34

Freecom DVB-T USB Stick	★★★★
Humax Duovisio PVR-9200T	★★★★★
Pinnacle PCTV USB Stick	★★★
Pinnacle ShowCenter 200	★★★★★
Sony DCR-DVD404E	★★★★★
Terratec Cinergy hybrid T USB XS	★★★★★

Audio page 36

Belkin TuneStage for iPod	★★★
Creative GigaWorks G500	★★★★★
Creative Zen Nano Plus 512MB	★★★★★
Evesham M-box 160GB	★★
iRiver U10 1GB	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
Philips SLA5520	★★★★★
Sennheiser PXC 250	★★★★★
Sony NW-A300	★★★★★

Networks page 38

Billion BiPAC 7402VGP	★★★★★
Buffalo AirStation G54 High Power	★★★★★
US Robotics Wireless MAXg ADSL2+ Gateway	★★★★★
Violet Nabaztag	★★★★★

Storage page 40

Asus DRW-1608P2S	★★★★★
Hitachi TravelStar 7K100 HD	★★★★★
Maxtor Shared Storage Plus 500GB	★★★★★
Plextor PX-760A	★★
Sony DW-G120A	★★★
Western Digital MyBook	★★★★★

Components page 42

AMD Athlon 64 3200+	★★★★★
Antec BK640B	★★★
Antec P150	★★★★★
ECS 945G-M3	★★★★★
ECS KN1 SLI Extreme	★★★★★
GeCube X1800GTO	★★★★★
Intel Pentium 4 640	★★★★★
Leadtek 7900 GT Extreme	★★★★★
PNY GeForce 7600 GT	★★★★★

Software & Games page 45

3AM Labs LogMeIn	★★★★★
Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0	★★★★★
Adobe Premiere Pro 2	★★★
Avanquest RadioTracker Premium	★★★★★
Lord of the Rings: The Battle For Middle Earth 2	★★
Black & White 2	★★★★★
Byte Systems Diino	★★★★★
Call of Duty 2	★★★★★
Civilization IV	★★★★★
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	★★★★★
Gametrak: Real World Golf	★★★★★
The Godfather	★★★★★
GSP Family Tree Maker Deluxe 2006	★★★★★
Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2006	★★★★★
Macromedia Dreamweaver 8	★★★★★
Magix Audio Cleaning Lab 10 Deluxe	★★★★★
Microsoft Visual Studio 2005 Express	★★★★★
Microsoft Works Suite 2006	★★★★★
Mozilla Firefox 1.0	★★★★★
Pinnacle Studio Plus 10 Titanium Edition	★★
Roxio MyDVD 8 Premier	★★★
The Sims 2: Open For Business	★★★★★
Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum 6	★★★★★
StudioLine Photo Classic 3	★★★
Symantec Norton Ghost 10	★★★★★
Ulead DVD MovieFactory 5	★★★★★
War on Terror	★

BYTE SIZE

BELKIN TuneSync

★★★★★
£30 inc VAT



Belkin's TuneSync dock lets you synchronise an iPod with a PC via USB. It's also a five-port USB2 hub. As it's powered externally, it recharges the iPod while the PC is turned off.

The 3½mm mini-jack port lets you play music from an iPod on a hi-fi or set of speakers. We found that it worked very well. It also feels tough and fits in with the iPod's styling.

If your PC is turned on, plugging in the iPod connects it to your PC, preventing you playing music. Unplugging the dock's USB cable lets you play music but disconnects every device plugged into the hub. We'd prefer a switch that lets you choose between connecting to a PC and playing music. Even so, it's well priced and is a worthwhile gadget for any iPod owner.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.belkin.com

LOGITECH Cordless Desktop S 530 Laser for Mac

★★★★★
£53 inc VAT



Logitech's S 530 is a Mac-compatible cordless keyboard and mouse set. The mouse is comfortable, but its tracking is occasionally slow and jerky, it's designed for right-handed users and the volume control buttons are hard to press.

The keyboard is responsive thanks to the short key travel, though touch-typists may not like the rearranged navigation keys. A set of keys controls Apple's iLife applications. You can change their function, but you can't make a key execute a command in one application and a different one in another.

The S 530 is comfortable, but it costs £20 more than the equivalent Windows PCs set.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.cancomuk.com
DETAILS www.logitech.com

EVESHAM

Axis Dominator 76GT

★★★★★
£999 inc VAT

The Axis Dominator may sound like a gritty World War II first-person shooter, but it is actually a PC on which you might play such a game. It's also the first Evesham PC to use Nvidia's mid-range GeForce 7600 GT graphics card. We wanted to see if the Axis would dominate our benchmarks or be forced into unconditional surrender.

The 7600GT may not be Nvidia's top-of-the-line graphics card, but it still managed playable rounds of Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2. The Axis will play most of today's games acceptably, but if you want smooth frame rates in newer, more graphically demanding games at the highest resolutions and detail settings, you'll have to upgrade the graphics card. SLI support means you can add another 7600GT for a healthy 3D performance boost.

Windows performance was more impressive. The Axis stormed its way through our video-encoding test, although the 200GB hard disk will fill up quickly if you edit a lot of video. The dual-core Athlon processor also did well in our multitasking test, so you'll be able to run multiple tasks at once, such as compressing a home movie while editing your latest holiday snaps.

The widescreen ViewSonic 19" LCD is great for watching DVDs or for working on two documents side by side. Photographers won't be satisfied with the viewing angles, though; unless you're sitting directly in front of the monitor, the image loses brightness and colour



accuracy. There was also some banding in our greyscale test. The Creative 2.1 speakers are fine for MP3s and games, although movie lovers may want a surround-sound set.

Accessing the inside to add upgrades is easy, though two of the three spare SATA ports are blocked by the SATA cable for the existing hard disk, as its connector points downwards. This isn't inconvenient, since there is only one 3½" bay for adding another hard disk and replacing the cable with a standard one is easy enough.

Adding a bulky PCI card could be tricky since access to the three PCI slots is restricted by the cable connecting the front FireWire port to the motherboard. These small but restrictive flaws could have been easily avoided.

The Axis is powerful in Windows but its 3D performance will appeal only to casual gamers. We wish the hard disk were bigger and the widescreen monitor had better image quality. There are other PCs available for around the same price with similar performance in Windows but with more powerful graphics cards, larger hard disks and better expansion options.

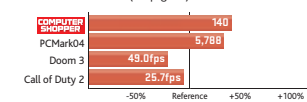
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Powerful in Windows
- ✓ Widescreen monitor
- ✗ Small hard disk

DESKTOP PC AMD Athlon 64 X2 3800+, 1GB RAM, 200GB hard disk, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, DVD-ROM, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7600 GT, 19" LCD
SUPPLIER sales@evesham.com
DETAILS www.evesham.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 58)



Also consider...

CARRERA Octan CS-02

★★★★★
£809 inc VAT



Carrera's Octan CS-02 has a powerful dual-core Athlon 64 X2 3800+ processor, which helped it to a particularly good score in our video-encoding test. Its overall score was pretty good, too, so this PC should cope with any application you want to use. It's helped along by a generous 1GB of RAM.

Graphics are supplied by an ATI Radeon X800GT graphics card, which powered Doom 3 to a respectable frame rate. It will happily cope with today's games. The 17" Sony LCD is easy to adjust, but its backlight was slightly uneven and white areas of the screen were not totally pure. It's also supplied with Creative Inspire P5800 surround-sound speakers.



A 250GB hard disk is standard for the price and offers plenty of room for your pictures, music, videos and applications. The Octan CS-02 is a powerful computer at a good price.

DESKTOP PC AMD Athlon 64 X2 3800+, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon X800GT, DVD+/-RW DL, 17" LCD
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com DETAILS www.savastore.com ✓ Very fast in Windows, large hard disk ✗ No FireWire ports FULL REVIEW Mar 2006

HP

Compaq Presario
SR1729UK

★★★★★

£660 inc VAT

Building a cheap PC is easy. Building a good-quality cheap PC is an art, and one that global PC companies struggle with. We were keen, therefore, to see what HP could do with its Compaq Presario SR1729UK.

It doesn't come with a monitor or speakers, so it's aimed at people with existing peripherals who want to upgrade their base units. If you're looking for a capable games PC, this isn't it. The Nvidia GeForce 6200 SE graphics card is underpowered and failed our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 tests. But you can replace it with any PCI-E card if you're keen on playing games.

This will be necessary if you want to get the best out of a monitor with a DVI input, since the existing card has only an analogue output. Although you could use a D-sub-to-DVI adaptor, you would have to fiddle with your monitor's controls to get the best picture.

If you're not interested in the latest 3D shooters, the Presario has many impressive features, including a dual-core Pentium D 920 processor (two 2.8GHz cores), which supports 64-bit instructions. Combined with 1GB of RAM, the Presario did well in both our image-editing and multitasking tests. Thanks to the extra processor core, it made short work of our video-encoding test. It is a more than capable video-editing PC, complete with two FireWire ports for connecting video cameras and Roxio video-editing software.

If the 300GB hard disk isn't spacious enough, you can add another internal hard disk. There's also a bay for adding another optical drive. We wish there were more drive bays, but the seven USB2 ports and



two FireWire ports are more than enough for adding external storage. There are two free PCI slots, although if you don't need faxing facilities and have broadband you can remove the modem for an extra slot.

Although 1GB of RAM should be plenty for most tasks, adding more in the future will be complicated by the mass of cables blocking access to the two free memory slots. The built-in floppy drive and memory card reader are useful extras, though the bundled keyboard feels spongy and the old-fashioned ball mouse should be replaced.

The SR1729 doesn't come with speakers, but it has support for 7.1 surround sound and an S/PDIF socket for connecting to hi-fi equipment. The software bundle includes Microsoft Works 8 and Roxio disc-burning, video and sound-editing software.

Without a monitor and speakers the SR1729UK won't suit people looking for a complete system, and its poor 3D performance won't please gamers. But if you have the necessary peripherals and want a powerful general-purpose PC, the Presario SR1729UK is good value.

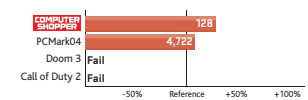
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent specification
- ✓ Good Windows performance
- ✗ Poor 3D performance

DESKTOP PC 2.8GHz Intel Pentium D 920, 1GB RAM, 300GB hard disk, DVD+/-RW +DL, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 6200SE graphics PART CODE EP150AA
SUPPLIER www.currys.co.uk
DETAILS www.hp.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 58)



BYTE SIZE

IMATION
Micro Hard
Drive 4GB

★★★★★

£120 inc VAT



IMATION's 4GB Micro Hard Drive is the size and shape of a padlock and feels just as sturdy. The flexible 4½" USB cable locks into place when unused and is unfurled with the flick of a switch. Its low profile means it can be plugged into most tightly spaced USB ports.

IMATION has included software for encrypting and synchronising files, but the quirky interface doesn't always work as you expect. Its performance at 2.96MB/s for large files and 0.75MB/s for small files is disappointing.

We liked the Micro Hard Drive's robust design, but it is almost twice as expensive as Seagate's 5GB USB 2.0 Pocket Hard Drive, which is faster.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.imation.com

CHERRY
FingerTIP ID
Board

★★★★★

£163 inc VAT



Using smart card and fingerprint readers, Cherry's FingerTIP ID keyboard can lock entry to your PC by specifying how each person must log in. You have a choice of any combination of fingerprint, smart card and password. One smart card is included in the box, but software is being developed so you can use your bank card as ID. The keyboard might look like it belongs to an old PC, but it's up to Cherry's normal standard and very comfortable to type on.

At £163 per keyboard, this is a very expensive product. Unless you really need a smart card reader, Microsoft's Optical Desktop with Fingerprint Reader is better value at £43, and a mouse is included as well.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.microwarehouse.co.uk
DETAILS www.cherry.de

PC NEXTDAY
Zoostorm 3-4301
Versatile PC

★★★★★

£583 inc VAT



Although it's a budget PC, PC Nextday's Zoostorm 3-4301 managed some respectable scores in our benchmarks. With its 128MB GeForce 6600GT, it notched up a playable frame rate in our Doom 3 test, while the 3GHz Pentium 4 processor and 512MB of RAM made sure that it did well in our video-encoding test.

PC Nextday supplied this PC with an SLI motherboard, so you can easily add a second 6600GT card at a later date and improve your graphics performance. This is quite a cheap upgrade to make.

However, upgrading the memory is more problematic, as both of the memory slots are full. While this dual-channel configuration increases



performance, it means that you'll have to throw the existing memory away if you upgrade.

That said, the Zoostorm 3-4301 performs well in Windows and as a games machine, all for a very reasonable price.

DESKTOP PC 3GHz Intel Pentium 4 531, 512MB RAM, 160GB hard disk, 128MB nVidia GeForce 6600GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17" LCD
SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.uk DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk ✓ Excellent 2D and 3D performance, can add a second graphics card
✗ No free RAM slots FULL REVIEW Apr 2006

BYTE SIZE

KOSS The Plug

★★★
£13 inc VAT

With so many people listening to music as they move around, there's quite a demand for headphones that can block out external noise. At just £13, these earplugs from Koss are the most affordable example we've seen. Each driver is fitted with a soft foam cushion, which you compress before inserting into your ear. On insertion, the foam expands, creating a comfortable seal that blocks environmental sounds.

This works quite well, but unfortunately the earplugs are let down by their sound quality. They have a massive amount of bass, but it doesn't sound particularly defined and comes at the expense of clear treble. Still, if you aren't all that fussy about getting perfect sound quality, these headphones do a good job for the money.

Simon Handby

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.koss.com

BELKIN TuneTie

★★★
£7 inc VAT

Belkin's TuneTies are small, flexible figure-of-eights that come in packs of three, and they reminded us of small rubber dog toys. In fact, the TuneTies are cable-management devices specifically for an iPod's bud headphones. You can tidy up excess cable by winding it around the TuneTies' middle and slotting it into notches at either end to stop it all unravelling.

The headphones themselves fit snugly into two cut-outs, which are the perfect size for iPod headphones. Sadly, they didn't suit all the other pairs we tried. Given that iPod headphones have only one metre of cable, the TuneTies seem like a solution looking for a problem.

Simon Handby

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.belkin.co.uk

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR: Athlon 64 3200+
MEMORY: 512MB DDR
HARD DISK: 160GB
STORAGE: 16x DVD writer
SOUND: Integrated
SPEAKERS: Stereo
GRAPHICS: Integrated
MONITOR: 17" LCD
EXTRAS: 56K modem
CONNECTORS: 4x USB2, network
SOFTWARE: Windows XP Home Edition
BASICS: Keyboard, mouse
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a total no-no.

2 If you're interested in editing your own movies, pay attention to the DVD rewriter. Make sure that you get one that supports both +R and -R formats. It's also worth getting one that will write two-layer discs, as this lets you squeeze twice as much information on a disc. There's not much difference in price between the different drive speeds, so we recommend getting one that can write DVD+R and -R at 16X and DVD+R DL at 8X. If you'll be doing a lot of video projects and disc writing, upgrade to a 250GB hard disk as a minimum.

3 Interested in games? Then upgrade to 1GB of memory and a 250GB disk and get a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the GeForce FX 6600 graphics processor or Radeon X700 will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to a GeForce FX 7900 GT or Radeon X1900XTX. You'll also need a faster processor.

4 Which faster processor? Faster AMD processors such as the Athlon 64 3400+ are good value. An Athlon 64 X2-based system will cost at least £100 more but runs multiple tasks faster. The alternative is a PC based on Intel's Pentium 4 processor. These are also pricier, but many people feel reassured by the Intel brand, and the fastest P4s always do well in our performance tests.

5 If you're really not interested in games you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor.

If you'll be using your PC for serious DTP, music or photo editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing, consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of PC activities. To hear the surround soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you. If you're interested in neither games or DVDs (or don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 Although 17" LCD screens save on desk space and look stylish, the limited display size means some may find onscreen text hard to read. A 19" LCD will cost around £50 more, has the same resolution (1,280x1,024) and is easier on the eye. It's better for those who want to edit large photos, documents or spreadsheets, run two applications side by side, or just look important. Twenty-inch LCDs are available from £400 and have a higher resolution (1,600x1,200).

8 The standard set of connectors can be usefully improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port, for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras.

9 Windows XP Home Edition is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never actually use it. But equally, you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for, in which case you'll almost certainly save lots of money by having it preloaded, though you won't get technical support included.

10 Money left over? A TV card will let you watch television on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder. Rather than splashing out on an extended warranty, pay extra to get the make of PC your friends or colleagues swear by.

